

EXHIBIT P

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Problems and Discontent Bedevil Chicago State

By Melissa Isaacson

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When the Chicago State University basketball team opened its season on Nov. 13 against Concordia University, almost everything pointed to success. The Cougars, wearing crisp white and green uniforms, took the court in the sparkling, recently completed, \$38 million Emil and Patricia A. Jones Convocation Center.

But the Cougar cheerleaders' exhortations echoed as if in a cave as Chicago State rolled to an 81 to 61 victory. Only about one of every 18 seats in the center was occupied, some 400 people in attendance at a facility built to accommodate 7,000.

In many respects, the turnout for the game is a symbol of the troubles at the university, a South Side state institution struggling with a rash of financial irregularities and educational deficiencies that threaten its accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission.

Situated on a spacious, tree-lined campus at 95th and King Drive, Chicago State is a commuter school with a student body that is nearly 90 percent African-American and Hispanic. Its mission is to provide an educational oasis in a neighborhood racked with crime, poverty and urban decay, but myriad problems jeopardize that goal.

¶Over the last six years, only 16 percent of the students who have entered the university have graduated, and nearly half who enter as freshmen do not return for a second year.

¶An additional \$7 million is needed to complete the Convocation Center, a project named for Emil Jones Jr., a former president of the Illinois Senate, and his late wife, Patricia, a graduate of Chicago State.

¶Elnora Daniel was forced to resign as the university's president last year after a state audit showed she had expensed a \$15,000 Caribbean cruise for her family as a "leadership conference." Before she left office, Mrs. Daniel also signed off on an \$18,000 expense for a tribute book promoting her accomplishments at the university.

¶Thirteen members of a 15-member search committee set up to hire a new president resigned in July 2008 when the trustees ignored the committee and chose Dr. Wayne Watson, a former chancellor of the City Colleges of Chicago and a friend of Chicago State's board chairman, Leon Finney. In 2005, Dr. Watson received a "no confidence" vote from the faculty at City Colleges.



The new \$38 million Convocation Center at Chicago State was nearly empty for the Cougars' opening men's basketball game.
José Moré/Chicago News Cooperative

¶Chicago State's former human relations director and top marketing officer have sued the university and its trustees. The two, Seth Hosick and Patricia Arnold, allege that they were wrongfully fired after they complained to state officials about abuse of power and the awarding of no-bid contracts by university trustees led by Mr. Finney.

Mr. Finney did not respond to a request for an interview, but Mr. Watson said the university's problems were being addressed.

"There has been change," Mr. Watson said in an interview earlier this month. "If you were to walk on this campus and talk to anybody the story nobody wants to cover right now because there's no blood and guts associated with it is the change that has taken place in a short time."

Dr. Phillip Beverly, an associate professor of political science who has been a faculty member since 1991, rejects that assessment. "The common thread that runs through all of this," Dr. Beverly said, "is negligence, incompetence and malfeasance."

Dr. Watson said that using the graduation and retention rates that federal accreditation officials cite was unfair at Chicago State because they applied only to first-time, full-time freshmen, who represent just 6 percent of the university's enrollment.

“My students go to school for a semester, drop out, earn money, go for another semester, drop out, may have a baby or their child may be arrested,” Dr. Watson said.

In fact, a look at how state officials confront the problems at Chicago State compared with those at other state universities does raise questions about Illinois’ commitment to the university.

When The Chicago Tribune exposed how some students were admitted to the University of Illinois flagship campus at Champaign/Urbana because of their alleged political ties, Gov. Patrick J. Quinn responded swiftly, creating a commission to investigate the matter and calling on all of the trustees to resign. Seven of the nine eventually did.

When Chicago State faculty members called on the governor to investigate the political ties of their trustees, Mr. Quinn took no action. In addition, he neglected to fill four vacancies on the board for months.



Dr. Wayne Watson became president of Chicago State in 2008.
José Moré/Chicago News Cooperative

Ann Kuzdale, a history professor at Chicago State, said the faculty was highly cynical of Governor Quinn’s involvement at the University of Illinois compared with the marked way he stepped back from the situation at Chicago State. It was, Professor Kuzdale said, “as if to say, ‘We’ll just let those people work that out for themselves.’ ”

Ms. Kuzdale added: “This whole thing has made me come to question the whole state university system.”

Bob Reed, a spokesman for Governor Quinn, said: “The fact is, the governor moved with deliberate speed to fill the vacancies and he has put in very strong and viable board members. He has long said that Chicago State is an important, vital institution.”

When the trustees selected Dr. Watson as president, he was expected to start on Aug. 1. But he could not collect his City Colleges pension if he took another job in higher education within 60 days of his departure, so the trustees changed his appointment to become effective Oct. 1, according to The Chicago Tribune. Frank Pogue, who had been appointed interim president after Mrs. Daniel’s departure, left that job on June 1, leaving the university without a leader for four months. Dr. Sandra Westbooks, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, was nominally in charge during that time.

Dr. Watson listed infrastructure improvements as his first priority, citing leaky roofs and inadequate laboratories as two of the most pressing problems.

But State Senator Edward D. Maloney, Democrat of Chicago, a Chicago State graduate and chairman of the Senate’s Higher Education Committee, said improving the university’s graduation rate should be at the top of the list.

“They have to raise standards, be aggressive about recruiting quality kids who are going to graduate,” Mr. Maloney said. “It’s a state university, not a South Side university.”

Dr. Watson supports a move initiated by State Senator Rickey R. Hendon, Democrat of Chicago, to create a \$40 million Chicago State satellite campus on the city’s West Side. Mr. Maloney opposes the proposal.

“I will do whatever I can to see that doesn’t happen until there is some proof at the current campus that there’s a willingness to improve,” Mr. Maloney said. “I can’t see anyone appropriating that kind of money for another campus when the current one clearly is not fulfilling its responsibility.”

As the controversies swirl, Chicago State’s students are paying the price.

On the university’s Web site, a letter to students from Dr. Westbooks offers a message in response to concerns over the educational status of Chicago State: accredited, but under review:

“I want to reassure you that Chicago State University is fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission,” the letter further states.
“Your degree is valid and recognized.”

Melissa Isaacson is a Chicago sports columnist and writer.

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